Metaphysics

- The study of *reality* in the most general sense of that term.
- Aristotle, “All sciences study being, but metaphysics studies being *qua* being.”
  - Physics studies being *qua* physical, biology being *qua* living, etc.
  - “Meta-physics” suggests something over and above physics
    - OK if this simply means something more general

Ontology: What kinds of things are there? (Suggestion)

- *Spatiotemporal particulars*: dogs, cats, trees, rivers, people, bicycles, hats, coats, steamships, coffee cups, houses, toothbrushes, etc.
- *Universals*: truth, redness, marriage, cancer, gravity, inflation, doghood, triangularity
- *Events*: this lecture, the 2008 presidential election, the inauguration of Barack Obama, my brushing my teeth this morning
- *Causation*, a specially important relation (universal) that holds among certain events and other things
- *Space* (is space a thing?)
- *Time* (whatever that is)
- *Possibilities* (whatever and wherever they are), necessities
- Minds, animals, persons
- God
- Abstract particulars: numbers, Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, Hamlet, Pegasus

Universals

- Particulars share general features or attributes, e.g.,
  redness, *heaviness*, *doghood*,
  These “things” are known as *universals.*
- But are these really “things?”
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Realism vs. Nominalism

- *Realists* about universals say that redness, etc. are indeed *things* in their own right.
- *Nominalists* deny this.

Arguments for Realism about Universals

- The argument from attribute agreement:
  - All dogs have some*thing* in common, in virtue of which they are all dogs
  - This "thing" is *their species,* i.e., canine-ness or doghood.
  - So, there exists such a thing as doghood.

Arguments from the structure of language or thought

- "Hawking is wise" is true, some fact must make it true
  - This is the fact that "corresponds" to the true sentence
  - It is the fact that Hawking (a particular) *instantiates* or *exemplifies* wisdom (a universal).

Arguments from the structure of language or thought (2)

- Abstract nouns behave like names of particular things, so they must refer to or denote things
  - Otherwise, they would be *meaningless* wouldn't they?
    - *Red* is a color, *Justice* is a virtue, *The whale* is a mammal.

Argument from knowledge

- Knowledge always has an element of generality
- Science, especially, studies what things have in common
  - E.g., what is common between falling cannonballs and orbiting planets
  - This involves bringing particulars under universals
  - Universals are the proper subjects of the sciences

Platonic Realism (Russell)

- Universals ("Forms") exist *separately* and *independently* of any particulars
- Universals are not in space and time
- U's are *intelligible:* they are fit to be grasped by minds
  - But they are not mental or psychological
  - They are part of the real world external to anyone's mind

- Particulars exist in the world of sense – they are – *sensible* – and subject to change
  - (R's distinction between existence and being is not mandatory)
- Universals are unchanging

Relations are universals, too

- X is *heavier than* Y, X is *the father of* Y,
  X is *between* Z and W, etc.

- Relations give rise to *relational properties:*
  - x is older than y (relation)
  - x is older than Barack Obama (relational property)
  - x is older than all of his or her siblings (relational property)

Language and reality: Relations
(Diagram omitted here)

A problem for Nominalism

- Nominalism tries to do without universals as entities
- Appeals only to particulars and to resemblances among them.
- But 'x resembles y' seems to express or denote a universal.
- So there must be one universal after all,
  contrary to what Nominalists claim.